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HINDOSTAN—A PIONEER TOWN OF MARTIN COUNTY

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[This was an address delivered at an Old Settlers' Meeting held at Hindostan, Martin County, Indiana, August 22, 1913.]

When President Madison took his oath of office on March 4, 1809, he was confronted with danger of a war with England and also with the fact that Tecumseh and his brother, The Prophet, were organizing the Indians of this portion of the United States for war with the whites. November seventh, 1811, the battle of Tippecanoe was fought and the Indians were defeated. Within a few months the first guns of the War of 1812 sounded and the Indians, allied with the British, assumed a hostile attitude. On March 27, 1814, at Tallapoosa, Alabama, Andrew Jackson defeated the red men so signally that they were not troublesome thereafter, and this was followed in December, 1814, by the signing of the treaty of Ghent, which declared the war at an end.

In the meantime several small settlements had been made in the southwestern part of Indiana. At Vallonia, in Jackson county, there had been a French trading post for many years and in 1813 an iron furnace was operated there. At Vincennes was an old settlement and also at Clarksville, near the Falls of the Ohio. A trail from Clarksville to Vincennes crossed the river here at Hindostan. The close of the War of 1812 and the cessation of hostilities with the Indians caused a decided movement from the East to the fertile regions of southern Indiana. There had been some land entered in this county [Martin] prior to that and a ferry had been established at the point where Houghton's bridge now crosses White river. The land there, the tract just north of the present highway and on the west side of the river, was the first land entered from the United States in this country. It was selected by General Washington Johnson, a soldier of the revolution, and postmaster at Vincennes, and he took out his certificate of entry for it June 2, 1807. It was at this place that William McGowan was treacherously shot by Shawnee Indians in the spring of 1812. With the general advance-

ment from the East there came several parties to the region now embraced in the boundaries of Martin county. Frederick Sholts located here at Hindostan and October 20, 1814, entered from the Government the land on which we are now standing.

At that time there were two other settlements made in this county. Like the one at Hindostan they were both made on the river. At Mt. Pleasant, Phillip Davis, Cager Peek, the Summers and Hunt families, Barney and John Riley, and James and William Lamar had found homes.

At the present site of Shoals the same year, Clement Horsey located and the following year James Stephens and William Daugherty opened farms on the west side of the river where the town of West Shoals now stands. In 1816 Joel Halbert, Daniel Piles, John Cox, L. Trover, Stephen P. Stringham, Harvey Manning, James Lewis, and Moses Norman located near Clement Horsey. It was thus the conditions were in that early day. Settlements of several families then were at the present site of Shoals and Mt. Pleasant, and Frederick Sholts at Hindostan. This was then a portion of Knox county. In 1816 Daviess county was formed and it embraced what is now known as Martin county. By the year 1818 a community of several families was located here at Hindostan. Among them being Joseph Clements, John Prentiss, Henry Prentiss, Thomas Prentiss, George Harris, the Shelmire family and Thomas Brooks. These people seem to have constituted the real bone and sinew of Martin county. For we find that in March 1819 they evidently had in contemplation the building of a town here at the falls. On the third day of that month Frederick Sholts sold a three fourths interest in the land on which Hindostan was afterward laid out and two lots, being lots 12 and 24 in Greenwich, to John Meriam. Greenwich was the first town laid out at the falls and was on the opposite side of the river. The date of its plat, like that of Hindostan, is unknown. However, it is certain that Hindostan was platted between March 13, 1819, and May 29, 1819, for on the latter date a deed was executed conveying lots in Hindostan and designating them as such.¹

¹ The following notice concerning Hindostan is taken from the diary of W. Faux, who passed over the Trace in 1819 on his way to visit the Birkbeck Settlement in southern Illinois.

"October 29, 1819. Breakfasted at an infant ville, Hindostan, on the falls of White river, a broad, crystal stream, running navigable to the Ohio, over a bed of sand and stone, smooth and white as a floor of marble. The baby ville is flourishing, much building is in progress, and promises to become a pleasant healthy town before I see it again. The land, too, is rich and inviting. I now crossed White river in my chariot."—*Editor*.

The town flourished. The country was developing rapidly. Danger from Indians was about over. The woods were still the lurking place of wolves and panthers but the hardy pioneer paid little attention to these animals. In speaking of this ever present peril it may be interesting to note one event which tradition has handed down concerning the wolves in this vicinity. It is said that near Hindostan, on one of the farms that was being hewed out of the wilderness, lived a man, his wife, and their infant child. The man was a true pioneer, jovial, entertaining, and a good fiddler. His services were ever in demand at the dances which were given by the early settlers. One night he was called to go to Hindostan to furnish music for a dance. Taking with him his violin he left home in the early evening and wended his way through the forest to the then flourishing town. Here all was brightness and joy. The tallow dips furnished light, the maidens were dressed in their best, their backwood beaux came clad in their holiday attire. The music rang through the trees. The whole town was present and a night of revelry and fun lay before them. Back in the forest, miles from the nearest neighbor, the wife and child awaited the coming of the night. Sitting in the door of the cabin, for it was early autumn and the days were yet warm, the mother crooned a lullaby to her babe and as it sank into sleep laid it in the crude cradle. Still singing she took up her evening tasks. The cow was milked. The backlog was placed on the fireplace and covered with ashes. It was too warm to need the blaze for its cheer, but matches were unknown, the flint and steel uncertain, and the pioneer wife kept fire in the fireplace ready for use. Seeing that the house was safe she went to the poultry house to close it that a few chickens might not be devoured by the roaming foxes and other predacious animals. Just as she closed the poultry house door a wolf darted into the clearing. It was followed by another, and another. They discovered the defenceless woman and bounded toward her their cruel fangs showing white in the twilight. Fearing to seek shelter in the cabin lest the wolves should thus be attracted to the open door of her home she hastily entered the chicken house and closed the door behind her. The wolves, as is the custom with such brutes, feeling that their prey was surrounded sat down and began howling. The night came on apace. Yet the babe slept calmly on while the terror stricken mother, safe herself, was powerless to fly to her child. Suddenly

clear and shrill, on the quivering air came the cry of the child. The wolves listened a moment and broke for the cabin. The helpless mother sank to the ground in an agony of fear, it seemed that her cup of tribulation was filled to the brim. Without weapons she could not attack the wolves. Indeed the interval was too short for her to more than breathe a prayer to the throne above. Almost as the words casting upon the Father the care for her child left her lips was her petition, uttered in extremest agony, answered. As the foremost wolf bounded into the cabin door the backlog of the fire-place rolled over and the cabin was filled with a burst of light from the newly kindled fire. Halting, the wolves slunk back and turned again to the forest. The mother rushed to the cabin and closing the door behind her seized her child and again a petition went up on the night air to the all-hearing ear. This time it was a prayer of thankfulness. The mother and her child were safe. When the father returned he endeavored to explain the miracle by saying that the vibrations caused by the feet of the wolves as they struck the puceon floor caused the backlog to turn. But the mother lived, and when full of years passed into eternity, confident that it was in answer to her prayer that her child was saved.

But to come back from tradition to history which is written. Shortly after the Hindostan company, as the organization was officially known, was formed, the men composing it became interested in the formation of a new county. They felt that Daviess Co. was too large and consequently they secured an act of the Legislature creating Martin county. The county was organized January 17, 1820. Even the organization of a new county did not appease these pioneers. They next wanted the county seat located at their new town of Hindostan. That they were entitled to it was their boast. The only store within the boundary of the county had been opened at Hindostan by John, Henry and Thomas Prentiss and the Shelmires. Mills were being builded for grinding wheat and corn and carding wool. There was a ferry established connecting the town of Hindostan with the town of Greenwich. People were coming in and settling. Everything was booming, to use a modern phrase. So, within two months after the formation of the county these business men of a century ago proposed to give for the location of the county seat the square known as courthouse square; the Seminary square; one half the square south of Seminary square;

160 acres of land adjoining the town plat on the north and five thousand dollars in cash. In addition they were to purchase for use on the courthouse a three hundred dollar bell. There were but two provisions or conditions attached to their offer. The first was that the courthouse square should be used for nothing but courthouse purposes. The second that of the money donated and that received from the sale of the donated real estate ten per centum should be set aside to establish a public library. This instrument, which is of record in the courthouse at Shoals, shows that the founders of Hindostan were not only business men who proposed doing things when they started, but that they were equally interested in educational matters as one full square was designated to be used for school purposes and ten per cent of all funds to go to establish a public library. Their offer was accepted and it was decided that the courthouse should be located at Hindostan. June 5 of that year the contract for the courthouse was let to Benj. Adams for \$4,185 and the following day Matthias Sholts received the contract to erect a jail for the sum of \$1,368.79. The meeting of the board of commissioners which accepted the offer of the proprietors of Hindostan was held March 27, 1820 at the house of Joseph D. Clements in Hindostan. The county commissioners were Matthias Sholts, John Meriam, and George Mitcheltree.

It is interesting in this connection to note the method of doing county business in those days. One of the matters determined at that meeting of the county board was tavern keepers' rates. On the twenty-ninth of March the board determined that the rate should be as follows: Keeping horse one night $62\frac{1}{2}c$; one horse feed $12\frac{1}{2}c$; one lodging $12\frac{1}{2}c$; one meal $37\frac{1}{2}c$; each half pint of whiskey $12\frac{1}{2}c$; each half pint of French brandy or other foreign distilled spirits $62\frac{1}{2}c$; for distilled spirits of domestic manufacture $37\frac{1}{2}c$. Think what an uproar would be the result if the commissioners of Martin county at their next session should endeavor to regulate prices in this method. But our forefathers were of sturdy stock. They did not have so much law to confront them as we now have.

They were, as a usual matter, honest, trustworthy, brave, diligent. The housewife shared with the husband the burdens of the day. She, too, must be brave and resourceful. She must be quick to think and equally quick to act. Take the tagedy over on the west bank of the river in the spring of 1812. The ferryman, McGowan,

and his wife lived alone in their little cabin. They were peaceable and industrious. The traveler passing from New Albany to Vincennes or returning home again was always met by them with ready help. They would assist him across the river and bid him God speed in his journey through the wilderness. One evening in the springtime McGowan was sitting in the shade on the east side of his cabin. There were no travellers needing assistance. As he sat there, in peace with his surroundings, an Indian, one of a small marauding party, fired from this side of the river and the bullet pierced his body. Then did the true heroism of that pioneer woman whom he had taken to be his wife assert itself. No aid was nearer than the small settlement at Maysville, twenty miles away, on the West fork of the river. She assisted the stricken man, partially carrying and partially dragging him, into the cabin. She barred the door and closed the window. Then she sat beside her loved one and watched his lifeblood ebb away. As night came on he became weaker and before midnight passed into that realm from which no traveller ever returns. Closing the eyes and gently arranging the body of her slain helpmate for its last long repose, Mrs. McGowan left her home, now desolate, and going to the field caught the horse. She mounted and rode away through the darkness for help that her dead might have christian burial. On through the night she rode. Ever and anon the shrill shriek of a panther would quaver through the air. But on and on she rode until at break of day she had reached the Maysville settlement. Then she returned, accompanied by several sorrowing friends, and ere long the last sad rites were over. Of such firm material were our pioneer mothers made. They have passed on into the land of shadows. But their example remains.

This session of the county commissioners also fixed the tax rate for the year. A gold watch was to be taxed 50c; a silver one 37½c; oxen 25c; horses 37½c; first class land 50c per hundred acres, second class land 43¾c per hundred acres; third class land 31¼c per hundred acres; poll tax was fixed at 50c.

On March 17, 1820 the first circuit court for Martin county was opened at the house of Joseph D. Clements in Hindostan. Johathan Doty was presiding judge and Ezekiel Porter and Frederick Sholts were associate justices. The first business was the issuing of a writ to ascertain what damages would occur by the erection of a mill on

Beaver creek near the present site of the town of Huron.² The petitioner was Charles R. Brown. The county officers then, other than those who have been heretofore named, were Thomas G. Prentiss, clerk and recorder; Julius Johnson, sheriff; John P. Porter, prosecuting attorney.

Now that a town had been established, the county seat located there, stores opened, mills erected, and all the necessary groundwork for a thriving municipality prepared the men who had pushed into existence this city of the wilderness felt that it was time for them to seek reward for their labors.

Consequently the Hindostan company disbanded. The promoters divided, by what is termed in the record a partner's deed, the town lots and lands among themselves. This deed is dated May 15, 1820, and shows that those who had brought into being a town here on the banks of the river were: Frederick Sholts, Caleb Fellows, John Meriam, John M. Prentiss, Gordon Newell, Thomas G. Prentiss, Wm. Gardiner and Jesse Shelmire. Upon the division of lots being made between the partners each proceeded to sell to those who had been attracted to the new town. The records in the recorder's office indicate that there was a vast amount of dealing in town lots and that people came from all parts of the East to cast their future lot with the Proprietors of the Town of Hindostan.

Hindostan was at this time in the full vigor and growth of a lusty young frontier town. The mills and business houses were far in advance of anything in Southern Indiana outside Vincennes and New Albany. There were other towns in existence. Vallonia was a trading post; Brownstown had been laid out in the spring of 1815; Orleans and Paoli had been established as towns in 1816; Palestine was the county seat of Lawrence county, having been laid out in 1817. Hindostan was in touch with them all but it was outgrowing them all. No internal improvements, such as canals or railroads were yet in existence and the choice of Frederick Sholts and his associates in selecting the falls of the river here as the location for their future city seemed to be a most wise one.

But about 1826 or 1827, the exact date is unknown, the hand of fate closed down on the thriving city. The street echoed to the wail of Rachel weeping for her children. The death angel stalked abroad. The cemetery, on yonder hillside, grew faster than the

² Located on the B. and O. railroad east of Shoals.—*Editor*.

town, here in the valley. The time was a terrible one. There was no resident physician, hence we have no positive account as to the character of the malady which swept from the face of the earth the town of Hindostan. We do know, from tradition, and from fragmentary records which can be pieced and interwoven together, that the toll of death was heavy. It is said that here were more dead than living within the bounds of the town at times. And the forefathers of the town were gathered to their fathers and all slept together in the bosom of Mother Earth.

The situation became so extreme that relief was sought at the hands of the Legislature and in 1828 an act was passed authorizing the removal of the seat of Justice of Martin county from Hindostan. This act was rushed through the session in its early days and was approved January 24, 1828 (it being one of the very first laws enacted).

At that time Mt. Pleasant was showing some improvement. As its name indicates it was situated on the summit of one of the river hills, Hindostan was in the valley. The fell disease which was decimating Hindostan was passing Mt. Pleasant by unscathed. The general awakening which was occurring over the entire frontier had reached Mt. Pleasant. There was a carding machine there, operated by Whitfield Force and there was also a cotton gin. For in that early day the citizens of this country wore not only home-grown and home-made woolen and flax garments but were also clad in cotton clothing the cotton for which was raised on these hillsides. On March 14, 1828, came the beginning of the final scene for Hindostan. On that day at a called session of the board of commissioners William Hoggat, Simon Morgan, John Murphy, and Friend Spears, commissioners chosen by the Legislature to relocate the county seat of Martin county, reported that they had determined to locate it at Mt. Pleasant. On the 7th of July 1828, the commissioners, still meeting at Hindostan, ordered the clerk and treasurer to remove their offices at once to Mt. Pleasant. On September 1, 1828, the commissioners met for their first session at Mt. Pleasant and the sun had set for Hindostan.

Thus was the town builded, thus did it flourish, and thus did an unkind fate cut it off in the full strength and prime of its youth. But it was not stricken from the memory of man. There yet lingers round its ancient bounds the story of its existence. Its builders

have all, long since, left this mundane sphere and taken their places in that city eternal, that celestial community which can never, never be effaced by death or pestilence. There, with the mothers who left home and comfort in the East to penetrate the wilderness and help found a State, they are resting. Their battle is over, their victory is won. It remains for us to do them honor and ourselves good by seeking to live up to all that was best in them and in our day and age to show equal energy and courage in perpetuating the government and country for our descendants on as noble a plane as they who founded Hindostan left it on for those who followed them.³

³ Hindostan was not the only town in Indiana visited by these epidemics. A similar story comes down concerning Rising Sun, Madison, New Albany, Vincennes, Salem, Indianapolis and many others. Palestine the county seat of Lawrence county suffered the same fate as Hindostan.—*Editor*.